

BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY



3 9999 06586 606 1



# The North End

GOVDOC  
F73.68:  
N6N67x

N 200 NEIGHBORHOOD HISTORY SERIES



HENRY ADAMS, the nineteenth century philosopher, said that the history of America is not the history of the few, but the history of the many. The people of Boston's neighborhoods have accepted the challenge of Adam's statement to produce "people's histories" of their own communities. Hundreds of Bostonians formed committees in each of fifteen neighborhoods of the city, volunteering their time over the past year and a half to research in libraries, search for photographs, produce questionnaires, transcribe tapes, assist in writing and editing, and most important, act as interviewers and subjects of "oral history" research. These booklets are not traditional textbook histories, and we have not attempted to cull a statistical sample. We have simply talked with our neighbors, people who remember, sometimes with fondness, sometimes with regret, but always with wisdom. For each of us has his or her own story to tell, and these stories are vital to the development of our neighborhoods and our city.

© 1975 BOSTON 200

*Boston 200 is the city's official program to observe the Bicentennial of the American Revolution from April 1975 through December 1976.*

KEVIN H. WHITE, Mayor  
KATHARINE D. KANE, Director  
1 Beacon Street  
Boston, Massachusetts 02108  
617-338-1775

Boston enjoys an international reputation as the birthplace of our American Revolution. Today, as the nation celebrates its 200th anniversary, that struggle for freedom again draws attention to Boston. The heritage of Paul Revere, Sam Adams, Faneuil Hall and Bunker Hill still fire our romantic imaginations.

But a heritage is more than a few great names or places — it is a culture, social history and, above all, it is people. Here in Boston, one of our most cherished traditions is a rich and varied neighborhood life. The history of our neighborhood communities is a fascinating and genuinely American story — a story of proud and ancient peoples and customs, preserved and at the same time transformed by the American urban experience.

So to celebrate our nation's birthday we have undertaken to chronicle Boston's neighborhood histories. Compiled largely from the oral accounts of living Bostonians, these histories capture in vivid detail the breadth and depth of our city's complex past. They remind us of the most important component of Boston's heritage — people, which is, after all, what the Bicentennial is all about.

Kevin H. White  
Mayor





Paul Revere's House, North Square, 1890 (*The Bostonian Society*)



Mather-Eliot House, Hanover Street, built 1677 (*Boston Public Library*)

**T**he North End is a blend of all four centuries of its history, the cultures of the old and the new worlds and the diverse activities of the waterfront and the city. It is Boston's Italian district and the most ethnic of its neighborhoods. It is also the oldest residential section of the city. Much of the old North End remains to remind us of the colonial past — Paul Revere's House, the Old North Church, Copp's Hill Burial Ground. It evolved from a populous and prosperous colonial neighborhood to an overcrowded impoverished ghetto of various European immigrant peoples in the 19th century, and has become today a vibrant Italian working class community.

"Isn't that something to be proud of?" demands Albert Mostone, sexton of the Old North Church. "To say, 'Look, these people had nothing in colonial days, and yet look what they built.' Here's a church been standing here weathering for 251 years. You've got somebody with you and you take him in the Old North Church to hear the lecture. You walk down these crooked streets. The first public school was here on Tileston Street; the street was named after Master Tileston, the first teacher in this area. I mean even to me, I really think this so many times, that it does something to me.

By 1650, the North End had gained a reputation as a good place to live. Accessible to the waterfront and the marketplace at Dock Square, its status was re-affirmed when Governor Thomas Hutchinson built his house there in 1710. By the time of the Revolutionary War, the North End was the home of both Tories and Patriots.

As with much of Boston, the topography of the North End has been altered by the filling in of swamps and small bodies of water to increase acreage. Its natural shape was a small peninsula, which grew wider at its tip, attached by a narrow neck to the rest of the town. The original boundaries fell within a ring drawn by present day Commercial and North streets;

the shore line was mostly marsh. The western shore of the peninsula, where Endicott and Thatcher streets are now, bordered a cove. In 1643, the proprietors of a corn mill on the cove dammed it off, creating a mill pond and enlarging a creek that washed over the neck of the North End. According to historian Walter Muir Whitehill, it "practically converted the North End into an island, dividing Boston in two . . . spanned by a bridge at North and Hanover Streets."

The first colonials to settle in the North End were merchants. They bought property along the waterfront and immediately began enlarging it by building wharves. The streets followed the natural contours of the land abutting the wharves — they were not patterned after cowpaths as it is commonly believed. There were three main thoroughfares and many smaller lanes which divided the area into large lots. These streets follow the same general course of Salem, Hanover and North streets in our day, though the names — Fish Street, Ann Street, Ship Street — were indicative of the old character of the area.

In the colonial town, people lived, shopped, worked and enjoyed their leisure within a small area. There were few comforts: transportation was slow; the absence of plumbing assured a constant, pungent odor from outhouses; preserving foods was difficult and expensive, necessitating daily shopping at early morning markets; the high cost of candles encouraged most people to go to bed soon after dark.

Recreation and amusement were restricted, along with all other luxuries; yet despite the town's Puritan origins, taverns were plentiful. According to G.B. Warden, "The English-speaking world of the 17th and 18th centuries appears to have been excessively alcoholic," and the North End had its share of ale-houses. The Green Dragon Tavern, where plans for the Tea Party were conceived, and the Salutation Tavern, gathering place of the Sons of Liberty, were frequented by merchants and bricklayers alike. Meanwhile the younger boys protected the dignity of the

North End against the South End boys. On Guy Fawkes Day, according to Frank Havey, retired head of the North End Union, "In the earlier days, before the Revolution, the old South End\* fought the North End on Marshall Street. They'd come up on their horses, and horse-drawn wagons and meet the North End crowd down near the Mill Creek, which was near the Old Oyster House. There would be a real battle going. That was the *old* North and South ends."

The earliest dwellings were frame houses with weatherboarding. The houses were small (five and six rooms) and the kitchen hearth was the only source of heat. The homes were often dark and shadowy. Sunlight did not penetrate small houses built close together on narrow lanes, and bright and spacious rooms would have been drafty. Both window panes and firewood were scarce in winter. In 1674, John Josselyn, an English traveler, wrote, "The merchants' houses are for the most part raised on the sea-banks and wharfed out with great industry and cost, many of them standing upon piles, close together on each side of the streets as in London, and furnished with many fair shops."

Paul Revere's house on North Street, which was built in 1680, is the only remnant of this early colonial architecture.

Throughout the 18th century, the North End remained the most heavily populated area of Boston. It was a fashionable section, inhabited by wealthy merchants and shipbuilders who found it convenient to live near their warehouses, wharves and shipyards. The merchants continued to 'wharf out' in front of their houses, converting the marshy shore into wooden piers. Their new houses were both more substantial and more elegant than the frame structures of the previous century.

\* Fort Hill South End — not the same area as today, which is fill.



he stature of the North End declined drastically after the Revolution. The leading citizens moved to the Fort Hill-South End, the West End, and later to Beacon Hill.

The wealthy loyalists who had lived in the district fled to Canada. Although a few well-to-do families were unwilling to leave, by the close of the 18th century the North End was a "region of small merchants, tradesmen, and artisans." Within a few years Ann Street had gained a reputation as a rough section, the old framed houses were subdivided by landlords and retail businesses moved to the once-elegant area.

The 19th century was a time of industrialization and vast immigration and by 1900 Boston's population had snowballed from 25,000 to 560,000. Settlement patterns changed as the once-classy waterfront areas became immigrant ghettos, cramped with cheap housing. Near the harbor and the growing industries, neighborhoods like the North End were close to the point of debarkation and convenient to jobs. The population density in the North End continued to increase as immigrants arrived and new tenements were constructed, until only Calcutta, India held more residents per square foot.

The immigrant experience began with a long, dehumanizing voyage across the ocean. Ann Antonino, a life-long North Ender, describes the humiliation: "A few times we did ask my mother how the trip over from Italy to America was. She said, 'They packed cattle better than they packed us.' They stayed on boats — you know, down below in the lower levels — for weeks on end. It seemed like they would never arrive in America. And the food was horrible, there was a lot of dysentery . . . the conditions were very, very bad. I think the only thing that kept them going was the fact that they were going to reach America. This was going to open up and make a big difference in their lives."

The European immigrants worked long hours for low wages under dangerous working con-



ditions, and the economy of Boston and the country flourished as a result of this under-rewarded labor. At the end of the 19th century, a significant response to the deprivation of the immigrants took form in the Settlement House Movement. These private charities set out to better the lot of the immigrants and to Americanize them. In the North End, the North Bennett Industrial School was founded in 1878 and the North End Union was founded 12 years later.

According to the 65-year-old Havey, "The Unitarians started the North End Union as a result of the work of Dr. Joseph Tuckerman of Bulfinch Place Chapel in the West End. He was called a minister at large, out in the community as well as conducting religious services. In his roamings Tuckerman went through the North End a lot and saw the same conditions he found in the West End; the poverty in those days, the 1890s, was tremendous. So he advised the Benevolent Fraternity of Unitarian Churches that they should start services in the North End. In 1892 on New Year's Day, this place, No. 2 Parmenter Street, opened. It was developed by Dr. Samuel Hubbard, a well-known educator. His title was superintendent of the North End Union. Its purpose was to help young men. Gradually it merged with a similar program to help young women at 32 Parmenter Street.

"They set up trade classes of various kinds. We had the first printing school and plumbing school in the country. The printing school was a tremendous school. They did books as well as posters, letters, flyers and membership cards. It gained the support of the Boston Public Graphical Union, which put it on a good solid basis with the industry, so our graduates moved into jobs right away. The plumbing school was handled in the same way. Then at No. 32, there were dressmaking classes so some of the immigrant gals could try and work in the garment industry.

"All that changed about 1915. Dr. Hubbard passed this on to one of the trade schools, either Cooper Union or Wentworth, and that ended our work in vocational training. The population of the North

End had become increasingly Jewish, and there were no end of programs to fill the need. There were weekly lectures and lantern-slide programs and discussion groups and dramatics and as the Italian group moved in, we began to put on operettas, and I remember them because they were still continuing. During World War II we had in the North End Union just about 100% Italian membership. And we had everything from little children right through to grandmothers. Everyone in the neighborhood was welcome, and considerable portions of each age group responded."

The North Bennett Industrial School was started by Pauline Aggassiz Shaw to offer to immigrants, "not alms but a friend, not gifts, but employment." Under the guidance of its director, Mr. Greenough, it provided instruction in laundry and sewing for women who were paid for their work as they learned. The school established an experimental kindergarten which was eventually absorbed into the Boston public school system. Woodworking and printing classes were set up for boys. Slowly, as the school began offering vocational training to public school students, it became an experimental laboratory for SLOYD, a movement in manual training. The school in 1905 extended its services through the summer by setting up camps. Though the resident camping was abandoned, the caddy camps, where young boys spent the summer earning a living on golf courses in the country, have continued since their founding in 1915. The Social Service Credit Union, which has provided small loans to North Enders for decades, also began through the efforts of the school.

"The North Bennett Street School has been influential," reminisces Marguerite Carbone, who at 72 recently retired as community aide for the North End Union Senior Citizens. "Years ago we had so much; teaching the children dancing, knitting, crochet and embroidery. Our biggest provider was a Mrs. Shaw from the Back Bay. She was very wealthy and one of the main supports of the North End Industrial School. As old as she was, she used to hobble

down with her chauffeur to see how everything was getting along. When I was a little girl, before the War, we had mothers' clubs, social clubs, dancing and singing. My father used to go there to dance. Miss Dorothy Jordan, a daughter of Eben Jordan, taught us dancing and even gave us little dancing slippers.

"Today they have veterans coming back and they teach them watchmaking, furniture making, electrical work. After they've learned the trade, they go out as craftsmen and get jobs. I never attended the North End Union. They did the same thing there, but for a different crowd: the Jewish and the Italian people who lived in that end."

**B**oston coped with its expanding population through landfill and between 1807 and 1824 the old Mill Pond was filled in with dirt from Beacon Hill, which was being leveled. Such fill projects, along with the construction of new roads and buildings, created a demand for laborers. The port of Boston was active and the number of small industries was multiplying.

Thus when the Irish potato crop first failed in 1824, spurring the huge 40-year migration to America, the North End was ripe to absorb new immigrants. In the North End, the Irish lived one family to a room, in tenements and the neglected old homes of the previous century. By 1840, Boston's Irish community was concentrated in the North End.

The Irish immigration of the 1830s and 40s finalized the departure of Yankees from the North End. To accommodate the vast numbers of impoverished families, the large, wood-frame homes of departed merchants were divided into numerous apartments and slowly, brick tenements began to appear.

Like the Irish elsewhere, most found work as day laborers in construction and the longshore trades. Many of the women worked as domestics or in department stores until they married. As Catholics, they were the targets of nativist discrimination and hatred. Excluded from most jobs, the Irish directed

their energies into building their Church and a strong political organization. With the promise of city jobs as bait, the machine that later produced John "Honey Fitz" Fitzgerald and James Michael Curley laid its foundation in the North End during the 1800s.

John Devlin is one of the last of the Irish North Enders, the "Dearos." In the early 20th century his family was one of the few remaining Irish in the neighborhood. His father told him enough stories to stretch his memory back to the late 19th century and a time when the Irish still controlled the North End. Now a teamster official, living in West Roxbury, he is involved in the North End Historical Society. He recounts that:

"Before I was born there was an exodus of the Irish out of Boston's North End. The migration pattern from Ireland was that the people from County Donegal, Ireland, settled in the North End and then they went to Charlestown and from there they went to Medford and Stoneham and the people that settled in South Boston were mostly from Galway.

"The Irish always helped each other in times of stress and privation and hunger. Everybody got together. For their social events, they used to go to St. John's Hall on Moon Street, right off North Square. When they didn't go there they went to Rogan's Hall in City Square in Charlestown. There all the belles in the North End used to look forward to dancing with Honey Fitz Fitzgerald because he was quite a waltzer and he had quite an eye out for the ladies.

"Politics was a lot different then. They would bring a team up to Hanover Street, unhitch the horses, and take them back to the barn. There would be straw on the floor of the open team and all the candidates who wished to address the audience climbed up on the back of the team and spoke. They had more give-and-take in that they were heckled with questions and they answered them. It made it very lively.

"In fact, this area now known as Boston's North End picked up the title of Dear Old North



End at a political rally in South Boston when John F. Fitzgerald was campaigning for office. As usual they had a plant in the audience and at the right time he was given a signal by the speaker that he was winding to a close and then he'd say his part. His part was 'Three cheers for the dear old North End' and this night he got a little confused and said, 'Three cheers for the Dearo.' The name stuck; they adopted it as their own.

"It was perpetuated for many years in the form of a candy bar put out by the Miller Candy Company called Dearo. There was a penny candy bar and a five-cent bar. And even to this day we have our annual reunion of the Dearos on Columbus Day. We alternate between St. Stephen's Church and St. Mary's Church. After a simple Catholic service, a low Mass, the people get together and reminisce.

"I remember stories about the Glen Guard House, a place in the North End run by people from County Donegal, Ireland. When the greenhorns came over from Ireland, they were met at the boat in Charlestown or in East Boston. They'd be allowed to stay at the Glen Guard House for a week. During that week, there'd be tremendous reunions going on. In the afternoon, while the men were at work, the wives would drop in. At evening, the men would go down after work and talk with them. They'd talk about conditions at home; they would exchange information, so after a while they had a vast network of information of all the immigrants coming from that particular section of the country. They served as a general, overall newspaper. During that week they had an employment committee which was going out to seek gainful employment for them. The end result was that most of the Irish immigrants wound up working for the Boston Gas Company.

"My own father worked for the gas company near the junctions of Prince and Commercial streets, not far from what was known as Goodnow's Lumber Wall, in an area that was named Dewey Square, after the hero of the Spanish-American War. Most of the employees of the gas company were from County Donegal, because they came from such a rugged and rigorous climate that

they seemed to be the only immigrants in Boston adaptable to this type of work. To this day, you'll find a goodly number of natives from Donegal working for the gas company.

"My father ultimately went to work for the City of Boston Public Works Department. His route was in the North End. He was 6-foot-2 and weighed about 240 pounds and they used to call him 'Big John Devlin' and they called me 'Wee John Devlin.' Being under eight years of age you can imagine what the comparison was all about. I was eight years old when he died, so I never had the opportunity to find out much about the specific kind of work he did.

"We had the Boston Molasses explosion many years ago, around 1916, or maybe a little later.\* It was one of the worst calamities that ever happened to our city, when quite a few persons lost their lives and the whole area was covered with sticky molasses for many, many days. It put the elevated out of commission because they didn't know how much damage the explosion had done to the overhead structure and they were reluctant to run trains on it again until they had sufficient time to check it out.

"As kids we spent a lot of time up on Snow Hill Street, a street since made famous because it was near where the Brinks Robbery took place. The street in those days was known as 'Connemara Hill.' As we would be coasting down the street in the winter we always uttered that Gaelic expression, *Fag a' bealach* which in English means, 'clear the road.'

"There were many famous persons born in Boston's historical North End. The most renowned was John F. (Honey Fitz) Fitzgerald, who was mayor of our city. We had many judges who had their roots here among whom were Walter Collins, Felix Forte, Frank Laborone and Arthur Barre Dolan. Old Solomon Levy had a store on Salem Street. Harvard boys used to come over and buy their clothing there. Toward the early part of the century the song about him

\* The actual date was 1919.



A Jewish restaurant, Salem Street. (*The Bostonian Society*)



A Jewish pushcart pedlar. (*The Bostonian Society*)

was sung at many gatherings, especially political gatherings all over Boston, and I can remember John F. Fitzgerald on at least two occasions telling me with pride how they elected the first Jewish man to Congress when less than 8 percent of the district was Jewish and his name was Leopold Morse, who afterwards founded the Leopold Morse Clothing Company.

"And I remember my late uncle, Mike Lynch, telling me that the grandfather of the man who now runs the Joseph Langone Funeral Service in the North End buried many an Irishman. We did not have insurance to pay for these situations and the Irish, following the tradition of the Jews, went door to door with a basket asking for donations. On more than one occasion, Mr. Langone, Sr. told my uncle when he was apologizing for not having enough money — he said, 'Michael, how can you give me money when you don't make it.' He said, 'Forget it.'"

**T**he Irish had begun their exodus from the North End to 'zones of emergence' such as Charlestown, Mission Hill, and South Boston, when large numbers of Polish and Russian Jews first arrived in Boston in the 1870s. Jewish immigrants were attracted to the North End for reasons similar to those of the Irish. Their community was centered in a triangular area bordered by Salem, Prince and Endicott streets. The community was short lived; a substantial and cohesive Jewish society did not develop until the late 1890s and had nearly disappeared by the 1920s. In these few decades, however, the Jewish population established a diverse institutional network: five synagogues, kosher markets and restaurants, Hebrew schools, burial societies and a loan society.

The majority of men earned their living by peddling, although a smaller number owned stores, tailored or were shoemakers. The Jews concerned themselves largely with education and their businesses. Politics were still dominated by the Irish, especially Martin Lomasney's organization.

Sam Gurvitz was born in the North End and spent most of his early years there. Though he now lives in Newton and works in Dorchester, he has continued to renew his relationship with the North End and is active in the historical society. He introduced himself:

"My grandparents came here about 1897 and they settled in the North End of Boston, where I was born in 1904. I lived there until 1926, having gone to the public school system in the North End. I went to Boston English High and graduated in 1920. From then on I've been working full time, but I graduated from Suffolk Law School nights in 1926 and passed the bar.

"At the time my family moved here, the North End was a predominantly Russian-Jewish community. The German and early Jewish people usually settled in the South End area where they had their synagogue. The Russian, Lithuanian and Polish Jewish people opened their own synagogues in the North End on Hanover Street and later on Baldwin Place, Jerusalem Place and on Salem Street. At one time there were five active synagogues in the North End. Most of the Jewish community and all the synagogues in the North End were Orthodox. But young people would go from the North End to Temple Israel, a reform synagogue, and to community church, and take what inspiration they could get from these sources and evaluate it, even though our parents didn't like the idea. They wanted us to remain Orthodox Jews.

"My home was a strictly kosher home. My people ran a strictly kosher restaurant in the North End for over 20 years, Gurvitz's Kosher Restaurant. We only served meat foods. In a strictly kosher restaurant you cannot mix dairy foods with meat foods. My father worked early in the morning 'til 8 or 9 at night. He would do the buying, so he'd have to get up early and the restaurant would open at 11 a.m. and close at 7 at night. All the kids helped out. We washed dishes. We would wait on table. I would take the cash on certain days. My mother did all the cooking. The biggest restaurant we ever had accommodated about 50 people. But I would say we served between 100 and 120 meals

a day. The most expensive meal I remember was 65 cents, and that was for a five-course meal.

"I was born on North Margin Street in 1904 and at that time my father tells me he was paying \$2 a week rent. You paid your rent by the week, because nobody could accumulate a month's rent. Different Jewish people owned the apartment buildings that we lived in. Very little of the real estate in the North End now is owned by Jewish people.

"I can remember one time when I was about 20, I invited a Jewish girl from Roxbury to come to a party in the North End. She accepted, but she called me later and said she couldn't come because there weren't any nice Jewish people living in the North End. So I said to the young lady, I said, 'is it possible for me to meet with your mother?' And she arranged an appointment for me and I went down to Roxbury to speak to the mother and I said to her, 'What makes you think there aren't nice Jewish people that live in the North End? It doesn't make any difference whether your daughter comes to my party or not. But I just didn't like the remark you made.' And I said, 'to tell you the truth, we moved from the North End to Roxbury in 1913 and we stayed there for six months and moved right back to the North End, because we weren't happy in Roxbury, but we were happy in the North End.'

"The days I lived there the young, non-Jewish people were still pulling the beards of the old Jewish men. It was very dangerous, in a sense, to cross certain lines. The Jewish people had their area, the Italian people had their area and the Irish had their area.

"We more or less recognized the different areas and walked with caution should we have to go through there. We all went to school together, the Italian kids and the Irish kids. When I was a youngster St. Mary's was the only parochial school in the North End and all of the children usually went to the Paul Revere School, the Cushman School, the Hancock School or the Elliott School, all of which were public schools. There was always a certain amount of friction. You can't prevent this. I imagine the same



friction that exists between the blacks and the whites today, that same friction existed among the Italians and the Jews and the Irish in the North End.

"We had what was known as gang fights. I played basketball for the North End Union, and if I went to the Boys Club of Charlestown and we beat them, we would have to run across the Charlestown Bridge in our sports clothes, because they wouldn't let us get out of Charlestown without a fight of some kind. The same thing happened in the Ellis Memorial in the South End of Boston, and that was an Irish group against which we played. Gang fights among the young people was an accepted way of life, and because of it we were perhaps more concerned about learning how to fight and wrestle and to cope with the problems of life in the North End.

"Well, the Italian kids called me, they used the phrase, 'Mazza Cristo,' which meant we were Christ-killers. That's how they referred to Jewish kids and we in turn would call them 'Dagos' and 'Wops,' and we would call Irish people 'Micks.' Every once in a while somebody would call them 'potato head' because of the potato famine that drove the Irish in large numbers to the United States. But all of these things completely disappeared as we grew older. When I got to be, say 18 or 19, it had all disappeared. They accepted us, we accepted them. Most of the storekeepers were Jewish and learned Italian to be able to sell to the Italian people that were coming in in large numbers. In 1926, when my family moved out, there were only 12 Jewish families left in the whole North End.

"Practically every Jewish boy went to Hebrew School. The girls did not. You went to Hebrew School from 4 to 6, Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays, and then Sunday morning. It was expected that Friday night you would go to the temple or synagogue with your father. And Saturday morning you would go to the synagogue with your father, which most of the young Jewish children did. In my younger days, nobody worked on Saturday, even the people that had businesses on Salem Street.

They were closed on Saturday and reopened at sunset.

"When I was a youngster, we spent a lot of time evenings in the different settlement houses and the North End Branch Public Library was a very busy place. And we had the Storrow Reading Club on Tileston Street that the famous Storrow sponsored. All of the people that went to the North End Union, with the exception of one boy, was Jewish. And that one boy was a Portuguese boy who lived right next door to the Union and only mingled with Jewish children. He spoke Yiddish and we accepted him as one of us.

"You know, I was in the North End this last Sunday for the Italian Festival, but when I was a youngster we didn't have Italian festivals because the Italians were outnumbered by the Irish and the Jews. It was about in the 20s that the Italian community came on strongly in the North End, as a result of which the Jewish community moved out. So that, excepting for the businesses, a large number of which were still Jewish, it was primarily an all-Italian neighborhood."



Though a small colony of Northern Italians lived around North Bennett Street before the Civil War, there was no great influx of Italians until the 1870s. The vast majority of these new immigrants were Southern. The immediate cause of the massive emigrations from Italy to America was the failure of the 1870 unification to relieve the plight of the Mezzogiorno, the South. Italian and Sicilian people lived there in poverty in the underdeveloped rural regions.

Usually the Italian men came without their families and settled in the North End, found work and saved enough money to send for their wives and children. Once a small group of Italians had made their home in the North End new immigrants followed their families or paesani, who helped them find lodging and work in the city. The housing in the North End lacked nearly all amenities.

"The buildings," explained Frank Havey of the North End Union, "had been built as speculated

housing, probably 75 years ago in answer to the wave of immigrants. Now, Cooper Street used to be a tree-lined street. Each house was a wooden framed building, with a front yard and maybe a back yard filled with apple trees. But the speculators built these four- and five-story buildings with small apartments — three undersized rooms — and no private bath facility, the bath being in the hall. It was shared by the families on that floor, which is not too uncommon in Europe.”

Most people found jobs in manufacturing or construction. Factory work among North Enders was concentrated in the garment, shoe and confectionary industries. “In construction work, there was the padrone system,” explains Pietrina Maravigna whose father opened a macaroni plant in Boston.

“People who had started up a little construction company of their own were responsible for going out and getting men to work. They took advantage of immigrants who did not know how to read or write. The men were given so much per day. I remember my father saying the highest pay was \$1.25 and that was back in 1910, '11, '12. Sometimes these people were taken out quite a distance from Boston. Because they were away and their living quarters might be in boarding house they had to pay out so much per week. They also paid for the straw that they slept on. Sometimes they wouldn't even get the straw. So it was like everywhere, there is always someone who is going to make some money on people who don't know the system. There were some very fine padrone, who were very sympathetic, but there were quite a number who made their fortunes by taking away what belonged to the people.”

Most large industry had developed in the smaller cities north and south of Boston, and thus the shoe and textile centers like Boston and Lawrence were the sites of vigorous worker protests and efforts to unionize. Workers had virtually no protection against employers who offered wages barely sufficient to scantily house, feed, and clothe a worker's family. Shops were dimly lit, lacking in adequate ventilation and heating, and reeking of an assortment of fumes

from glues and chemicals used to make shoes, candy and dyes. Yet, if the employees quit or struck, newly arrived immigrants could be hired in their place. Attempts to improve wages and factory conditions were met by owners with court suits, mass firings and violence.

A small segment of the Italian community responded politically to the impoverishment and exploitation of immigrants. Italian laborers in the Boston area joined in the labor struggles in the garment, textile and other industries which were discovering new strength during the initial decades of the century. A small but lively Italian anarchist movement, with roots in Italy and generally unsympathetic to unions, evolved as well. A textile strike in Lawrence caused a stir in Boston and the North End. Judge Felix Forte, a Harvard graduate and Superior Court justice who was born in the North End, recalled:

“In 1912 came the Lawrence Strike of the American Woolen Company. I worked at the Boston Herald and I went down to Lawrence and saw the two labor leaders of the I.W.W., (Joseph) Ettor and (Arturo) Giovannitti.\* There was a riot and somebody was killed. Ettor and Giovannitti were charged with murder. They were eventually found not guilty because it was not one of them, but a guard, that fired the gun.”



s the center of Italian social and cultural life in Boston, the North End was a natural clearing house for news and ideas within Italian radical circles. In 1916, Emmanuele LoPresti began publishing a socialist newspaper, *La Noticia*, on Battery Street in the North End. Upon his death in 1918, Graziano Longarini took over the paper and adopted a more traditionally “progressive” pro-labor

\* Industrial Workers of the World. A radical union which espoused “syndicalism,” a philosophy that eagerly traded government for “One Big Union” composed of local worker “syndicates” based within individual factories or industries.



St. Mary's — 1897. The Church was rebuilt in 1877.



St. Leonard's (ca. 1895) was the Catholic church built by the Italian immigrant population.

stance.\*\* North Square and Faneuil Hall were favorite sites for meetings and anti-war rallies. During the '20s the North End was the setting of numerous public demonstrations in favor of an acquittal of Sacco and Vanzetti, and eventually their funeral. Nicholas Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, a shoemaker and a fish peddler, were two anarchists falsely accused and convicted of committing armed robbery and murder in Braintree. In 1927 after seven years of public protests proclaiming their innocence, they were executed. Anarchists, dressed in black and wearing black string ties, joined other Italian-Americans in a huge funeral procession which moved along Hanover Street to Langone's Funeral Parlor. Children and their parents came out to watch the two heroes being carted away, an event which remains a vivid memory for those North Enders who saw it.

Most immigrants, however, turned to their religion to find solace from the hardships of their lives in Boston and the Catholic Church retained its central place in Italian life. The Irish had already established churches in the North End, but they were hostile to the Italians, so the immigrants founded their own.

"St. Mary's is the oldest church in the North End," says Marguerite Carbone. "That church was really the church of the Irish. They came from Charlestown, Dorchester, Roxbury. St. Leonard's Church is another big church which consists of Neopolitans. And Sacred Heart Church is made up of the Genoese, who were the first. Then the Sicilian people moved in and took over. And they have this Saint Rita at Sacred Heart, their favorite saint, the saint of the rosary."

Amidst the poverty of the immigrant ghetto, preserving Italian customs and adapting them to the conditions of Boston enriched the immigrants' lives and proved a strength against the exploitative conditions of their work. The annual wine-making, the love of gardening and of music, the rituals of an

\*\* The paper was published as a daily and then a weekly until a few years ago. During the Sacco and Vanzetti trial they gave complete sympathetic coverage of the entire ordeal and their circulation was up to near 50,000.



Italian funeral and the delights of Italian food made life bearable — even good. The large and close-knit family was the center of social and cultural activity.

"The festas are really feasts which they had in the old country and brought back here to the North End," explains Mrs. Carbone. "The oldtimers have kept up the tradition. Sicilians have their St. Joseph, St. Agrippina, Madonna de Sorcorso and the Fisherman's Feast, while the Neopolitans have the St. Anthony Feast, the feast of St. Lucy and the feast of St. Rocco and the feast of Madonna della Cava, from the other part of Italy. St. Anthony is the biggest saint here and they make an awful lot of him."

The immigrant Italians exercised little control over the institutions that affected them daily. This problem of authority and self-pride seemed important to William Whyte in his study of the North End in the '40s, *Street Corner Society*. Doc, the leader of a group of adolescent Italian males, once said to him:

*"You don't know how it feels to grow up in a district like this. You go to the first grade — Miss O'Rourke. Second grade — Miss Casey. Third grade — Miss Chalmers. Fourth grade — Miss Mooney. And so on. At the fire station it is the same. None of them are Italians. The police lieutenant is an Italian and there are a couple of Italian sergeants, but they have never made an Italian captain in Cornerville. In the settlement houses, none of the people with authority are Italians.*

*"Now you must know that the old-timers here have a great respect for schoolteachers and anybody like that. When the Italian boy sees that none of his own people have the good jobs, why should he think he is as good as the Irish or the Yankees? It makes him feel inferior.*

*"If I had my way, I would have half the schoolteachers Italians and three-quarters of the people in the settlement. Let the other quarter be there just to show that we're in America."*

Youngsters used the neighborhood, the beach and the

waterfront, the few open lots and the settlement houses for their recreation. Some of the boys hung around the Old North Church where, as George Antonino, a Salem Street barber, remembers: "We had a good opportunity to make an extra quarter, half a buck a day reciting the history of the church to tourists. All summer long, we'd stand on the corner, waiting for a tourist car to come by. You have to visualize running boards on an automobile. An automobile coming up Salem Street or down Hull Street. The first one to sight the car would own the job. He'd jump on the running board of the car.

"Before the tourist even had a chance to know what was going on he'd be saying, 'The walls of this church are two-and-one-half feet thick. Made of old English hand-made brick. The signal lanterns of Paul Revere were displayed in the steeple of this church on April 18, 1775, to warn the country of the march of the British troops from Lexington to Concord. Right beside the Old North Church stands a little old Italian chapel. This is where the British officers held their very first meeting. This church stands 175 feet high. Up on the hill, on the right, is Copps Hill Cemetery. The cemetery was built in 1659 and was named after David Copp. In this cemetery, there is a tombstone which has a funny saying on it which goes like this: Stop here my friends and cast an eye. As you are now, so once was I. As I am now, you must be. Prepare for death and follow me.'

"And one day a Harvard student came along, by the name of George, picked up a piece of chalk and wrote beneath the same tombstone: To follow you I'm not content unless I know which way you went."

Accompanying the cemetery were legends about tunnels that led from the tombs to the waterfront. Antonino says he and his wife Ann, "used to sit in the cemetery on Copps Hill at night when we were kids, and one or two of the older kids would always tell mystery stories. And we'd talk about the tunnels that led from the Old North Church to the cemetery. They claim, and the church will probably verify, that if you enter a couple of the tombs up here, you can actually walk down and under. So we used to imagine dead

rich soldiers or generals — God knows who's buried in here — and swords and rings that are worth money."

There have been dramatic changes in the North End, physically and economically, during the past 75 years. The building of the Sumner and Callahan tunnels divided the district and meant the demolition of many apartment buildings and stores. With the construction of the expressway in the 1950s the area of the North End was further decimated.

As a way-station of working class immigrants, the North End gained a reputation as a slum. Although, as Judge Forte recalls, each Italian family was "proud of its home and kept it so clean that you could practically eat from the floor, and did the same with the streets," the neighborhood was denounced as dirty and dilapidated by city officials. Before the Second World War, there were generally no loans from the banks for home improvements and mortgages; there was too little money among North Enders to allow for such luxuries. However, during the early post-war years, when the nation's affluence spread into the North End, loans from the banks were not forthcoming.

Frank Havey elaborated: "On the whole, the banks didn't consider this a good place to put their money. Especially in the 50s and 60s, the banks were not sure whether the North End would be torn down or what. Of course, this became a vicious circle. If nobody invested in the area, then the area would continue to go down, and you couldn't break the cycle. Some of our bigger banks wouldn't touch it. But there was one bank that more than all the rest, put a lot of money into loans for families for building and rehab purposes. Some others helped a little.

Other problems accompanied the red-lining policies of the local banks. "In the late 50s and early and mid 60s," Havey continued, "we worked with Ed Logue and the BRA. They wanted us to be declared an urban renewal area, and we said, 'No.' They went through a long hassle, and finally we established that if we could get things moving here, the neighborhood would come back and come back strongly. Logue

appreciated this more than some of his staff and vowed it would be a rehabilitation job. But along with it they saw a spot renewal program. Here and there were buildings not worth repairing. If the cost of purchasing the building and the land plus the cost of rehabbing brought the total above the market rate, a building would be torn down and not replaced. Thus, there would be more open area in this very crowded North End, little vest pocket parks where the sunlight could penetrate as it hasn't in 75 years.

"The neighborhood was quite excited about it, and Ed Logue guaranteed no more than ten per cent demolition. Guy Beninati and the North End Rehabilitation Conservation Committee came up with a suggestion that the whole Waterfront Urban Renewal Project — the area from Atlantic Avenue to Fulton Street — should be made into new housing for North End people. For the first time in their lives they could have moved into beautiful new homes without leaving the North End. Out of the Rehab Committee came a Development Committee that worked on this for three years. Then they did not get the nod from the mayor. We were ready to go but we did not get it. Nothing was done until now — things are beginning to happen."

The waterfront was once an integral part of the North End. The Sicilian fishermen docked their boats on the piers, the warehouses were stocked with meat and produce, and the ferries traveled back and forth to East Boston.

"Atlantic Avenue," muses Pietrina Maravigna, "I used to love that place. I miss the Narrow Gauge. When I was young, that was just like crossing the ocean. It was a ferry. You got on the ferry, it was a dime. That brought you over to East Boston and in East Boston you'd get on these wonderful trains, there were four and five wagons, comfortable. And I don't think we paid except the dime we paid on the ferry because if you got on the ferry you could get on the train for nothing. And the conductors were just marvelous. I loved all the fish places down on Atlantic

Avenue. You could get a fish for 25 cents that today would cost you four or five dollars. Of course, we had a lot of fishermen and customers that would come into the store and bring us a fish, big huge haddock, and say, 'Here, Mr. Maravigna, 'this is for you — here.' And the fish boats coming in. It was just marvelous."

**R**ecently, the character of the Waterfront has changed radically. High-rise, luxury apartments have replaced old wharves and warehouses. "This used to be a fishing area down here," says Rose Giampoalo, who played as a child along the old waterfront. "The men would pull in fish from the fish pier and bring them into the fish stores. They'd hire men and women to work by the day. They would sit down and clean those shrimps, tunas and clams, and pack them. Nowadays many people live there. I had always thought the place was deserted because it was all warehouses at one time. But today people are living in them. Commercial

Wharf is being modernized. They have like a lawn, they have flowers placed on the side. We have professional people living there today — doctors and lawyers. There's a dentist down there now. They have a florist shop down there, and now they're building restaurants."

A North End-based Restudy Committee for the Waterfront has a sub-committee for elderly housing, which is drawing up plans for housing along the old wharves. However, the entire North End is once again being viewed as a desirable neighborhood by the well-to-do in the city of Boston. Renovations of warehouses along the waterfront and of the old tenements on Prince, Fleet and Charter Streets are pushing rents beyond the means of the present residents. Thus, these people who have fought and struggled to make their neighborhood a good place to live, find their way of life threatened. It is impossible to describe the fabric of Italian culture in the North End as it evolved over the past 100 years. The personal recollections that follow suggest the diversity and richness of the Italian experience.



T-Wharf fishermen baiting trawls, 1903. (*Boston Public Library*)



"O Labor of America: Heartbeat of Mankind"\*

*And now we as Italian-Americans bow in  
both humility and pride as we ask you  
to stand by and acclaim  
your brothers from the land that  
gave a new hidden world to the world.*

Carmela Cerqua is a short woman with flashing black eyes and an impish youthful look which belies her 82 years.

"We came to Boston because my father was here. He know friends here. I'm still here all my life. My parents left Italy because they were too poor. It was worse here. My father was here in 1900, three years before we came. It was very hard when he wasn't there. We had to work hard. My mother had to go to work. When you're poor, you're poor all over. In Italy; here — poor, poor, poor.

"I remember the boat ride over. I was only nine and half years old and I got sick. I got the misery. It was about 19 days I was sick and the boat was rocking so. When you got sick they sent you to an island near the port where you were going to get off. Because I was young, my mother and my sister had to come with me. They transferred us to Governor's Island and they didn't even register us. They forgot us over there. We were there about 10 days at the island, then they took us back to the port. My mother got acquainted with this man and she had the same address in the North End that he had. So she told this man, 'Will you ask for my husband? Tell him that his wife and two kids are here.' That's how we got out, otherwise we would have been deported the next day. Because nobody claimed us.

\* From: "O Labor of America: Heartbeat of Mankind," Arturo Giovannitti, organizer and leader of 1912 Lawrence strike.



Carmela Cerqua. (Paula Bonnell)

"When I came from Italy, I lived on Hanover Court, a little dead-end street. We had only three rooms. It was very hard.

"We had no entertainment; couldn't dance. My parents were really old-fashioned and they had different ideas than ours. My father wouldn't let us girls go out. We used to have girlfriends only while we were working. My mother didn't teach me how to do anything. I learned through other people. You see, you ask, and you learn. We had to stay home and work. We did housework — cooking, cleaning, ironing, washing by hand. We patched things, we didn't have any money to buy clothes. We did a lot of crochet. We used to make neckties; we used to make sweaters. I made bedspreads, tablecloths and linen handkerchiefs. We used to buy a sack of flour — the empty ones, they're very soft — wash them in water and make diapers. We used to make sheets out of them, too. We'd join them together, take all the stems off and make sheets. In cold weather the water was very, very cold. The clothes used to freeze.

"I didn't have any education. I went to Cushman School at night, but we didn't have to learn too many subjects, just your name, your address. We had a teacher, her name was Miss Hatch. She was a young girl. She'd say, 'Who knows how to sing Italian songs?' So we didn't learn too much. That's why I don't know how to read and write too good. Then I had to go to work. All my life I've been working, since I was 12. Now I'm 82. I had to take to work and earn my times. I had to work days, and then I had to work nights. I worked and went to night school. I used to fall asleep. Before I went to school, I had to do the housework, because my mother was working too.

"I worked at the candy place in Cambridge. To get the jobs, you had friends and they talk about you to the boss. We used to work just by hand and I was a fancy dipper. There were certain signs I put on candy — the 'B', the 'C', the 'W', the 'S' . . . they represented the candy that was inside.

"I met my husband through my oldest sis-

ter. She bought a butcher shop on Lewis Street and my husband was working there. Whenever I was by, there was my husband. He looked at me, I look at him. My husband was a handsome man! He asked my sister to ask me if I wanted to go with him. She never told me. One day she said, 'My butcher wanted to go out with you, but he's a stranger and you know how Papa is.' He came from Rome and I was from Avellino, so he was a stranger. She said, 'There's a widower with a couple of kids. He wants to ask you to marry him.' I says, 'Give me your husband and you marry him. I didn't do anything wrong that I got to marry a widower.' After a couple of days, my husband stopped me. He said, 'Did your sister talk to you?' I says, 'No, why?' He says, 'Didn't she ask you if you wanted to go out with me?' I didn't know what to answer. I liked him. He told me, 'You're going to tell me yes or no.' We met like that.

"He was working across the way from where I was working. We stopped at 5 o'clock. He'd stop at 4 and as soon as I'd go out, he used to come and talk to me. I had to sneak when I wanted to see him. But I used to see him morning, noon and night. I lived on North Street where North Court is and he used to come as far as Richmond Street and then turn back. This went on for quite a while. Then my sister squealed on me. She said, 'She's going with a stranger.' My father was very much against it. My husband said, 'I want to come to talk to your father. I want to get married.' 'Boy,' I says, 'What trouble we're gonna be in.' That was it. He came up to the house. What I went through! My father raised holy hell. He didn't like the idea; he used to call me names. We got married seven months later. My father was always against it. My mother didn't have too much to say because my father was the big cheese.

"I remember Sacco and Vanzetti. They killed them. They said they were guilty, although they were innocent. But they never proved them guilty. They were laid out on Hanover Street and I saw the casket. A lot of people went to see them because two

of them died at once. It was written up in the newspapers, they had pictures of them and everything. They said Sacco and Vanzetti stole money or something. The politics was in it; they were supposed to be anarchists. They had rallies in Chelsea. In Charlestown, with the jail, they had a lot of rallies. The people fought and fought and they couldn't win.

"Don't remind me of the Depression. People don't understand the Depression now. They're so used to having everything they want. We went through it. We used to go on line. We couldn't get work.

"The banks failed. People were crying in the streets. My father had \$800 in the bank; he got \$300. You saved all your lifetime and the banks closed. People would wait in line to get a quart of milk for two cents. The city had to give clothes and food. Then Roosevelt came in. The people were so glad. The WPA came in and \$12 a week you had to support a family. But I never went to any of them. My husband was ashamed. I borrowed money and I lived. We had a store. We never made good, so we had to close. My husband was a butcher. He didn't find any meat cutters and he couldn't work. I used to go and get work a week, two days, a month. I worked in a sweat shop then — we had the steam iron. We got 75 cents an hour. Worked eight, nine hours a day. Now I'm working 22 years steady. Still, I work seven hours. Sometimes I say, 'How did I do all this work?' But we had to do it. We worried about the money. There was no other way."

Albert Mostone's ambitions to become an engineer were thwarted by his family's lack of money for an education. To him, the early Revolutionary part of the North End is intricately bound up with the Italo-American culture that flourishes there now. Though he moved to Medford years ago, the 71-year-old sexton of the Old North Church has never really left the North End.

"My people were from Avellino, Italy. My father came here, he was 14. He was 94 when he died, so he was probably living in the North End about 80 years before

he passed on. I moved over here in 1916 on Salem Street, there were nine of us in three rooms. The girls had one room and the boys slept in the kitchen. They had these beds, like daybeds, but not that nice. You'd pull it out of the wall and an automatic spring would flop the mattress over. In summertime, when it was real hot, we spread our mattresses on top of the fire escape and went to sleep on the roof where they used to hang the clothes. We had kerosene lamps — I studied, and so did a lot of boys of my period, under kerosene light. And the clothes irons were all metal, no electricity. They put them on top of the coal stove to heat up. Later on they came out with irons that had a tube and the gas used to heat the bottom of the tube.

"My father happened to be a construction foreman. Construction work on the outside would stop when the first snow fell, because they didn't have snow removal. Laborers had no work until the following April. My father just stayed home then. There was no such thing as welfare or unemployment. The men used to work hard — we used to buy a barrel of flour, they used to put up vinegar peppers in that barrel. They would get the coal in the summertime and we boys would bring the wood in.

"When the snows were unusually heavy, they would go shovel the tracks for the city or for the Boston Elevated Railway. But that wouldn't last long. Once the roads were cleared and downtown Boston was shoveled clean, their work was done.

"When I started to work fulltime I was just about 14. I had graduated from grammar school and I had to get out to work because the expenses were quite great. I sold newspapers and shined shoes on Atlantic Avenue. Our license would only allow us to stay out until 9 o'clock at night. When we got home after the curfew, the police, who were like the London bobbies with big high helmets, would give us a whack across the bottom. We didn't dare answer them back.

"When I was 11 years old, I would go to work with my father as a water boy. Just filling up a



bucket of water and feeding water to the men who were building roads or putting in sewers. Or, if they needed a shovel, a saw, hammer, nails, I'd bring it down. My first week's pay, 60 years ago, was two dollars.

"Actually, I really wanted to become an engineer. I went to Central High and I went to Winthrop Institute. But it was impossible for me to go any further, because all the money I earned I had to turn into the family.

"In my house, the father was generally 'the man.' In other words, if I did something wrong . . . of course, mothers are mothers and they don't always tell the fathers what went on. If it was really something, father would do all the disciplining. If he had to wallop you, he'd wallop you. If the teachers at school had to give us a wallop, we got it and the parents wouldn't disagree with the teachers. All my father had to worry about was to see that there was enough food on the table and that we had good warm clothing.

"The oldest son in a family was the second father and being the oldest, I was responsible for four or five other brothers and sisters. When I sat at the table, if there was a glass of water missing, my sister would automatically go up and get it. But if there was a bucket of coal missing, I or one of my brothers would have to go down to the cellar. That was not my sister's job. Even to the present day — they're over 60 — they still respect me as the head of the family. If they have any difficulties, if they feel they need my advice, they'll talk it over with me.

"And there was *no* tension. Everyone knew their place. If a couple of my brothers and sisters were getting into an argument, I'd say, 'That's enough.' They would automatically stop.

"We were no different from any of the kids in these days. We used to raise Cain. We hooked school, mostly in April. We'd run down to North End Park and go swimming. The truant officers used to come, but we'd have kids on opposite sides, watching the street. When we saw him coming, we'd run like the dick-

ens, clothes or no clothes. When the circus came to town, we'd try to sneak under the tents and get inside without paying. Or we'd go see a movie. If I went down to the market and picked up 10 crates and sold them, I made 40 cents. I wouldn't want to go to the movies alone, so I'd ask one of the boys. We'd be home at 3:30. Sometimes the teacher would write a note and our parents would know anyway.

"The theater we went to the most was the Bowdoin Square. They opened at nine o'clock. We got our work done Friday night so Saturday morning we'd get in at nine and go to what we called 'up in heaven.' We'd stay there until six, when they threw us out. During the winter we had a beautiful gymnasium here on North Bennett Street in the Industrial School. We had our clubs and a lot of church activities. The Holy Name Society had meetings for the younger boys. In the church hall they would have plays. If we had snow on the ground we would take our sleds up to the top of Hull Street and coast right down. We used to spread ashes — we had plenty of ashes because of the coal fires — and we'd spread them over here just before hitting Salem Street. The ashes would act as a brake for the sleds.

"In the summertime my father used to go over to the brewery and wholesale house and get a pitcher of beer for 15 cents, or he'd step into a barroom and put the pitcher under the spigot. The guy would fill that up for 15 cents, good cold beer, and they'd bring it up to the house. All the kids'd have their beer; they'd have their wine.

"People living here on Salem Street would know people down on North Street, at the opposite end of the section. It's very few people that don't know somebody down in the other end. If I didn't know you, my sister might. For instance, years ago, we had several factories here. My sister was a forelady in a candy factory and she had 30, 35 girls that she was supervising. That would create a friendship with my sister and would automatically include me and the rest of the family and the rest of the neighbors.

"I give a lecture in the church once in a while. I tell them about the church, with the first altar ever built by an American. The church is still lit by candles. We have a burial ground beneath the church, and the oldest bells in North America here. Then I go up and ring the bells for them, the bells that were rung by Paul Revere. Some people say to me, 'How come this church is all original? They destroyed all the others.' I say, 'Remember that this was the Church of England once and if the Sons of Liberty won, the church would be intact. If the English had won, it was still their church and they weren't going to destroy anything that belonged to them.' It's sometimes these simple answers that are the hardest to find."

II. *From that venerable mother of  
America, from the land of  
ecstasies and sorrows, of  
Ancient glories and unbearable  
humiliations.*

Rose Giampoala is a short, well-built woman in her sixties who grew up in the North End and raised her children there.

"Times were very hard then. Some say the good old days. I remember them. They were very wholesome and very simple. It was nice because we spent most of our nights at home or visiting the neighbors next door. Whenever one was sick, the neighbor next door would come in to take care of you. But I don't think I'd like the idea of going back to those days.

"My parents came here from Italy without

a dollar in their pocket. They had to start at rock bottom. They were married here in the North End at the Sacred Heart Church across from Paul Revere's house. It was difficult for them, because they had no friends. They couldn't speak English. My father was very good to people from his town. When they came from Italy they wouldn't have a place to go. If a man from my father's town came and was looking for a place to stay, he would come to my father's house. My father would give them a bed to sleep. He would ask his friends to find out if they had a place for a boarder. This is how people lived. They would earn money by taking in boarders. My folks took in, not boarders, but members of the family. Like if a brother or a sister came in from Italy.

"It was all bedrooms then. They didn't have furniture like we have today. In those days, all they had was a bed. If they had a bureau, that was a luxury. They would have old fashioned chests that they could take from Italy. This is what they used to put their clothes in. They didn't have many closets and closets were small in those days. They didn't have so many clothes and a suit that perhaps they would wear on a Sunday or in the evening. Until the time I married I only had two pairs of shoes, a black shoe and a summer shoe.

"In my days we had no facilities. What we had here cold water walkup apartments. There was no heat in the hallways. No heat in the apartment. There was no hot water. Your toilets were out in the hallway where two families would have to use the same toilet. There were no sinks. You would have to heat water in a pan or a kettle. You would take a large pan and heat up a large amount of water and you'd have to use it sparingly because the water was ice cold, especially in the winter. Then hot water tanks began to appear. And we would have that connected to the stove. You would only have hot water in the winter; in the spring and summer when you didn't have the stove lit, you had cold water. Then the gas stoves came in with a tank. You could have hot water for 24

hours if you wanted it. But people didn't have the kind of money to keep it running for 24 hours, so they would have to use it only during the day, economize and put it out at night.

"When I was a little girl we used to have an elevated structure on Commercial Street. The elevated trains were running from Everett Station to South Station. After World War I they got rid of this elevated structure. And the freight trains on Commercial Street would take meats, produce, and other things to the open market pier which they're doing away with now, because of the new bank.

"I really enjoyed the waterfront when we could go swimming in the ocean. At that time there was a pier extending out into the water — what we called the 'H'. It was a landing in the middle of the ocean and on one side was the sandy beach. We would go swimming from that sandy beach to the pier. If you could make the 'H' swimming, you were a good swimmer. After I married, I would take my children up on the pier on a hot night. You could look at the Navy Yard from one side of the pier and look at the North End from the other. My children enjoyed this.

"My father was a laborer. There wasn't much work in those days. My father would have to work out of town, say in Brockton. We didn't have trains or cars, so they would have a truck meet them at the corner of Prince and Salem or at North Square at 5 o'clock in the morning, pick them up, drive them to Brockton like a herd of cattle. If they were working out quite a ways, like in Springfield, they would come home only on weekends.

"During the Depression I was very young. There was no work to be done. Most people went under the WPA, but the WPA only put on payroll people that didn't own property. My father happened to own property. He began to use up all the savings he had and he still wasn't getting work. That was '30, '31, '32. He had to borrow money from a few close friends. It was a good thing he was well liked. He didn't have a job during all those years. He finally did get a job; he



Immigrants in the North End; from the article "Society's Exiles" which appeared in the periodical, *Arena*, in 1890. (Boston Public Library)



Aerial view of the waterfront, 1925. (Boston Public Library).



worked on it about three or four days when he took sick and died in 1939.

"I feel bad for anybody today who ends up in a factory. They become machines in a factory. Before the unions became strong, the men I worked for, they were slave drivers. And people were slaves in factories. They had to work very hard under constant supervision, someone over your shoulders watching, seeing that you didn't stall for a minute. My highest pay was \$25 a week. Five and half days, nine hours a day, five hours on Saturday. Twenty-five dollars was considered big money. And if there was no work you would stay home and get along on a day's pay. Or maybe two hours.

"But the unions came in and I think that was the best thing that could have happened to the poor. When the unions came in, the people began to have more liberties. And they began to get more benefits. If they only gave you two hours of work, you were guaranteed a minimum of four hours. Before the unions came in, if you were an old worker

they favored a new worker, whether you or she could produce more. They could fire the old worker and keep the new one because it was to the company's benefit. Since the union came in the owner cannot lay off an old worker and favor a new one. So I'm all for unions."

Judge Felix Forte is a distinguished Harvard graduate, an intellectual and former Superior Court justice. He presided at the famous Brink's robbery trial.

"My father left his native land, Italy, and came to America in 1893. When he got a job in his trade, that of a printer, he sent for his sweetheart, my mother. She came over and they were married at the pier. They settled in the North End. I was born at 28 Prince Street.

"The economic conditions were not very favorable at that time. It was a hard life and there was no workman's compensation. That's why we had mutual aid and benefit societies, which gave a member seven dollars a week in case of illness or incapacity and also gave them a decent burial. I remember printing the constitution bylaws



Teaching infant care to Italian immigrant mothers at the welfare clinic at the North End Union, 1920. (*North End Union*)

that every member should attend the funeral of a deceased member or he would be fined two dollars.

"My father was the printer for all the Italian societies and in those days there were about 150 in the North End. The print shop started on North Street, 174 North Street, near Fulton Street. Then my father moved it to 375 Hanover Street. Right into the same house in which we lived. Then he moved into a store on Fleet Street. He stayed there the rest of his life. That's where he died. I was about six or seven years old when I started to help my father. I worked in his shop.

"During my childhood in the North End, there were three separate ethnic groups. On the east side of Hanover Street was the general Italian section, literally a little Italy. Italian was the only language that was spoken on the street as well as in the homes. The signs on the doors and on the store windows were in Italian. Toward the harborfront, along North Street, lived the Sicilians, who were mainly fishermen. The early settlers of the Italians came from Genoa and little towns surrounding Genoa. They lived along Hull Street. And another group on North Street called the Columbus Associates. In North Square the immigrants gathered waiting for employment.

"As soon as a large enough group came to the North End from their native town, the men would start a society and organize it in the name of the patron saint of the town. During the summer they'd either have an outing or they'd have a religious celebration. There was the Irish group that lived along Charter Street. They had an athletic club of great prestige known as the Charter Oaks. Then, along Salem Street and side streets was the Jewish section.

"There were no such things as hospitals in those days. In fact, there was a prejudice against hospitals. Midwives were very busy. Children were brought into the world at home and not in hospitals. When I was very young, there were no Italian doctors. We did have a Jewish doctor, who used to wear a Prince Albert suit and charged 50 cents for a home visit. He was very popular with me. The first

opportunity after he examined me he told my mother, in my presence, that I could have ice cream. Then came the Italian doctors. They didn't know English. I don't know how they got licensed to practice. But their chief source of income was as Society doctors. He would get one dollar a year for each member of the Society, say \$125, and in return he would look after them free of charge in case they got ill.

"When I was old enough to go to school, I attended the oldest grammar school in America, the Eliot School. I'm proud of the Eliot School. It was the school that Benjamin Franklin attended, Paul Revere, John Hancock, Samuel Adams, the Reverend Samuel F. Smith, who wrote the words for "America." Then I went to the oldest public school in America, the Public Latin School, for a secondary education. When I graduated I went to law school. There I had to pay tuition. My father had only one asset, and that was a gold watch with a gold cover. He prized that watch. He bought it by weekly payments. Well, he pawned that watch so that I could finish the year. I graduated at the head of my class, not yet 21 years of age.

"When I got through with the law school, I went to the Boston Legal Aid Society. No salary, so had an evening office at 375 Hanover Street. I eked out a living and finally got a 'raise' to \$25 a month.

"After a while I was called to teach Anglo-Saxon philosophy of law. I became a professor and eventually I earned the degree of doctor of juridical science — S.J.D. at Harvard University. In the course of my life I was asked to be a justice in a district court and then to be a justice in the great trial court of the Commonwealth, a justice of the superior court."

Phyllis Luciani remembers the color, the warmth, and the variety of tradition in the North End.

"My mother came from Italy. She had a sister living in the North End and she would go to visit her often. I used to look forward to these weekly visits because I came from a city that was countryish. I used to go

out the window where my aunt lived and sit on her fire escape and look at the people. When my mother got through visiting with her sister, she would take me along the streets in the North End and bring me into the pastry shops. She'd buy a pound of this, a pound of that, and we'd go home and have a little feast.

"Dock Square and Faneuil Hall were filled with pushcarts. People from all over came down to Faneuil Hall at Christmastime to buy their trees. For amusement, we sometimes went to the Casino on Hanover Street. They used to have operas and they brought the opera singers from Italy. They later would show Italian movies. The amusement had to be in Italian because a lot of people didn't have the opportunity to learn English.

"The feasts they used to have would come on the weekends. Mother would dress us all up, because the feasts were a big thing in our lives. We'd see lots of people, carts along the streets, balloons, and roasted chestnuts. And we'd have figs on a string. These things were all imported from Italy. They had a flying angel. A girl would be suspended in the air on a rope. She was dressed in white and had wings, like an angel. The rope was strung across the street from one building to another. One man would be in one building, pushing the rope; another man would pull the rope. Everybody would be looking up, holding their breath. When she descended, you could hear the relief in the crowd, the clapping, that she finally made it. This was a big thrill in my life.

"As my own son grew older, he joined the band at our church. They had to play in the North End, during a feast when they had the saint marching to the church. There were about four men who took the saint out of the church and put it on their shoulders. They paraded the saint through the streets, with the band following. People came out and put money on the saint. Men would pin the money — one dollar bills, five-dollar bills, even tens and twenties. They used to take this money to help the church and the society. Each society vied with one another to see who would make the most money.

"The month of September was wine-making time at the home. My father would take us to the train station in Charlestown where the grapes would come in from California. He would test one grape, test the other — there were many different kinds. And my father would make a mixture, because the more grapes that you put in, the better tasting it would be. Making the wine was a big chore. Four or five friends from the North End would come to the house to help. The way they did it, they had to scrub the barrels and check to be sure there weren't any escape holes for the air to get in. The grapes had to be boiled and sugar put in. Oh, the aroma of boiling wine! Made you really want to drink it right then and there. The men would go down into the cellar and put the boiled grapes into a great big vat and they used to crush the grapes by stepping on them with their boots on.

"They didn't have the grinders and wine presses such as they have today. And they'd come upstairs from the cellar smelling of wine. Their boots would be wet. The house would smell of the brewing of the grapes. And the grapes had to ferment. Every day my father'd go down and he would turn it and taste it. When the wine was ready, he would call his friends back and they would sit around the table, tasting the white and the red wines. They'd have fun and they'd joke and they'd tell stories. It was a kind of feast in itself. Out would come the nuts, the salami, the Italian bread, and we would have a lot of friends sitting around the table. There were many times when his wine would not turn right. It would go sour and taste of vinegar. It would be a big joke in our family. We would just laugh and laugh. It wouldn't go to waste. Mother would use it as wine vinegar for salad dressing.

"When I asked my father why, with all its beauty, he left Italy to come here, my father would tell me, 'There's not too much industry in southern Italy. We had to come to make our fortune here. We knew that there were many, many opportunities for everyone alike.' And America has been a good country for us."



III. *From the garden of the earth, from the  
only land of many tender and mystic names:  
Etruria, Augusta, Enotria, Esperia,  
Saturnia, Vulcania, forever Italia.*

Pietrina Maravigna, a member of the North End Historical Society, has written numerous articles about the North End for the *Boston Globe*. She is a small, energetic woman who cares a great deal about her community.

"My father, Giuseppe Maravigna, came twice to America before settling permanently. The only son of a rich proprietor of vineyards, Dad left Italy desiring to regain the losses incurred by a vine pest which spread through Sicily in 1906. His first trip brought him to New York, from where he traveled to the state of Washington to join his brother-in-law. He worked, as did many other immigrants, in construction. The men waited until they got to town, when a job was finished, to cash their earnings. Dad had 18 pay checks to cash when the 1906 Panic struck. Banks closed, but Dad continued to work without guarantee of pay. He had faith in his employers and that faith paid back — when banks reopened, his checks were honored.

"Two years later, Dad returned to Italy and engaged in the commerce of oil, lemons, and oranges. In 1908 an earthquake in Messina cut off railway service and enormous quantities of crated oranges rotted away. So Dad arrived in Boston in May of 1910. Mother, my oldest sister, Concetta, and I followed him in early 1913. My sister Maria came several months later with my godfather.

"When Dad arrived in Boston he wanted to start a macaroni factory. To accumulate capital he went to work in construction again. In later years he often recalled walking to work from the North End to Kenmore Square, encountering six to nine foot snakes in the swampy land after he passed Copley Square. He told of how men who came from warm, sunny Sicily and the southern part of Italy shivered in their light clothing, having arrived during the warm season and being unprepared for the bitter cold.

"Construction was the only kind of work that immigrant men, skilled and unskilled, found. Though many immigrants were from agricultural areas and used to hard work, they were not used to the bitter cold, to working underground, pushing wheel barrows up scaffolds, or digging ditches. Here they toiled ten to twelve hours a day. There was a great deal of danger, too. The men had to climb the scaffolds because they didn't have elevators to haul material up electrically. They pulled big stone cuttings by rope, without hoisting equipment. It was all back-breaking work — and they had to work fast because if they slowed down, other men would replace them. Dad told us about when they were building Filene's, digging the two stories that are underground, some mornings they would find two or three men who had slipped while they were working and had died.

"Added to these great working hazards, the immigrants found an antagonistic climate. They were wanting work where other groups had established a strong foothold. It was primarily economic reasons that made this social antagonism — the Irish felt Italians were going to push them out of their jobs.

"By late 1911, when Dad wrote to Mother to send over my oldest sister, he had started to design an automatic macaroni-making machine. Mother refused to send my sister and insisted that the whole family come. Because of eye trouble Mother had been refused passage twice to America, so Dad worked at two jobs, almost twenty-two hours a day, to be able to send enough money for us to come first class.

"With Mother on her way, Dad designed an upright macaroni machine and had it cast in Chelsea. He started making macaroni with one machine in December, 1913 at No. 16 Fleet Street. I remember the first years he was at Fleet Street. Italian macaroni was the only kind of macaroni accepted in this country. It was mostly Italian people who ate it and they wanted the imported, so in the first years, Father had a very difficult time trying to interest people outside of our community to buy it. On Sunday mornings he would go to early Mass and then he would take a little black valise with samples of the 25 different shapes of macaroni we made then. He'd go up to Maine, New Hampshire, to the North Shore and South Shore cities and towns, to try to introduce his macaroni. People would slam the door in his face and ask with what audacity did he come to sell American-made macaroni. But Dad was not discouraged. He kept on making contacts. He reaped his reward for his persistence. The War came and macaroni from Italy wasn't coming in any more. People had to buy the American-made and Dad made excellent macaroni.

"We had lots of faithful customers. One man came in every week, since we started until way into the Depression, bought two 20-pound boxes, and carried them all the way to South Boston. A Greek merchant with a store up in Maine, bought from us for over 40 years. In 1922 Dad won an international first prize and gold medal for quality in Rome, and later he won three more prizes for quality macaroni.

"Even Enrico Caruso enjoyed Maravigna macaroni. When Caruso came to Boston, the whole opera troupe came to eat at the Grotta Azzura, a two-room cellar with a homey atmosphere at 292 Hanover Street. The Grotta Azzura was Caruso's place and Caruso was a very generous person and a wonderful host. He would invite all present to have drinks of wine and he paid for them. And then his golden voice would fill the rooms and rise out to where the people on the sidewalk could hear him sing.

"People often comment on the gathering of

men in front of cafes in the North End. Before and shortly after World War I the newcomers would gather in large numbers in places like North Square, in front of banks and travel agencies on Hanover, Prince and Salem streets. Here people sent money to their families, got passports, received and sent mail, and met people from their home villages; many of the men came here alone and were hungry for news of their relatives and loved ones. Many of the men lived in tight quarters and had to get out for breathing space. It was here that those who couldn't read and write got a letter read or written and found out what was happening in the world. It was the place to socialize, as the majority didn't have the homes to do it in.

"Today, the men go into the cafes on Hanover Street, have their expresso or capucini as in Europe, get enthusiastically involved discussing political issues and whatever, often finishing their discussion outside on the sidewalks. They easily get carried away, appearing to be settling the affairs of the universe."

Virginia Magliaso is today a Revere resident. She moved from the North End after the death of her mother and grandmother. Yolanda D'Eramo, 55, is a North End native who works as a translator at Massachusetts General Hospital.

Virginia: "I liked the way the families got together, having stores right outside your door and the church close at hand. I enjoyed the feasts. They'd start on a Friday night and go right through Sunday night, and finish with a band concert Monday night. All the money they made at the feasts was for the church. The people helped the churches. Nobody went to a priest for help — they came to us for help. We'd be in and out of the church all day long, and everything was for the church. The older people went to church every morning. Religion was everything to them. They would go to church, sit down, say a few prayers, come out and see their friends, and spend hours and hours just reminiscing. There weren't any organizations, just the church and the societies. The church was the only



Salem Street scene. (*The Boston Globe*)



Paul Revere's Mall, locally known as "The Prado" is an open park between the Old North Church and Hanover Street. (*The Boston Globe*)



outgoing.

"A lot of the people came from towns in Italy where they had land, and they missed their farming. Every house had a little pot with herbs, they grew mint and parsley in the window or on their fire escape."

Yolanda: "And on the roof they used to grow a lot of things. Some people had land on the outskirts of Boston and they'd go there on Sundays in the summertime and farm and raise vegetables and fruit. In the winter, they'd have their preserves. The women used to go to the country and come back with those great big burlaps filled with dandelions. They'd sell them on Salem Street."

Virginia: "And the husbands used to go to the country to pick up the wild mushrooms. The women knew just how to figure out whether they were poison or not. When they boiled the mushrooms they'd put a dime in, a little bit of silver. If the mushroom was poison then the silver would turn green. But just the same, a lot of people got sick even when the silver didn't turn green."

"Ninety percent of the women that worked at that time worked in dressmaking places and shoe factories. They used to be stitchers, buttonholers. They did hard work."

Yolanda: "There weren't any unions then. There were what you'd call sweat shop conditions. They saved money to bring some of their brothers and sisters or their parents to this country. That's why they worked so hard to get some money together."

Virginia: "Today when people come from Italy a lot of the people here resent them because they do want to work. The immigrants work all hours, where a lot of people, because of the union . . . but the people that come from Italy — they're hard workers. They don't mind the work."

"The Italian people that lived in places like Arlington, Medford, and Everett used to come to the North End a lot. They used to come on weekends to do their shopping, because it's the only place they could get Italian food."

"I don't think the North End is a slum."

It is congested and now, with all the cars . . . But, the tourists that come into the North End make it a slum. They throw things out the windows of their cars. But in the North End, they're very clean people. And they always were. You'd never see a dirty window. Never had a window washer. I remember sitting on the windowsill and my mother would hold my legs and I'd wash the windows on the outside. They've got pushcarts and it looks like the slums because they're selling food. But they clean it up often. They've come a long way in the North End. They've got the facilities in their homes they didn't have 50 years ago. You go in the homes; they're immaculate. Even today."

Yolanda: "I'll tell you when they'll move out of the North End. When they can't afford to pay the rents."

Virginia: "Or if urban renewal comes in and forces them out."

Yolanda: "And then who moves in? A lot of American people are moving in because they can afford the rent and it's near to everything."

Virginia: "I remember when my grandmother died. It was February and we had a terrible snowstorm. They couldn't leave the body in the house. We had to go to Holy Cross Cemetery in Malden. The hearse was driven by horses and it took so long to get there. And then they couldn't bury it because of the snowstorm. She was up three flights of stairs and they couldn't get the casket down the stairs. They took it through the window."

Yolanda: "They used to wake them right in the house. Funeral parlors didn't exist."

Virginia: "The Italian people never wanted to leave the dead alone."

Yolanda: "It was a custom to go on 24 hours a day. All night someone from the family had to stay up and people used to come and visit at all hours of the day and night."

Virginia: "And then some friends would come and sit up with the family. Now in the funeral parlors you go from 2 to 4 and 5 to 7. My grandmother's wake was for three or four days. The oldtimers were very close

to each other. The people used to congregate at a wake. When my aunt died, there was no room. People were down the steps at the building, trying to get up the stairs. It was the North End way of living that everybody that knew them came to pay their respects. If one person came to the wake and then somebody died in that person's family, you made it your business to go. That's why they had those big funerals. They used to tie up everything in the street — even 30, 40 years ago, there were still parades. The bands would play at the funerals."

**Yolanda:** "The only time they didn't have a band was for little babies. They used to have a little white hearse."

**Virginia:** "Pall bearers used to march alongside the hearse, remember; now we don't even have that. They're rushing us right to the grave. Soon, they're gonna take you before you die."

**Yolanda:** "This is the big argument they're having now. When is a person dead? Who would ever think that we'd come to something like this. We knew what you went through. We knew what life was.

**Gabe Piemonte** was a long time member of the Boston City Council.

"Both my parents were born in Avellino, Italy. Its only claim to fame is that it is the source of water supply for Naples and Rome.

"As youngsters we walked all up along the Atlantic Avenue waterfront from the Charlestown Bridge down past South Station under the wharves. That area is now filled in. During Prohibition we used to pick up the whiskey bottles down there and sell them to the bootleggers for two cents each. There were warehouses where now the Coast Guard is located. They extended on piers right out in the water. On Sun-

days we used to go there, because every Saturday the warehouse employees had a card game and we'd go there for cards and look around for loose quarters.

"Every Labor Day there was a swim to Boston Light from the Charlestown Bridge. Boys and girls competed then and each swimmer had a rowboat accompanying him.

"In the old days, the freight trains stopped on Commercial Street. Some of them carried coal. To get heat, we'd just hop the trains and get the coals. I can also remember hopping the freight trains to get ice. The trains carried produce and other refrigerated merchandise. The ice was in a pit alongside and when the car would be emptied, they'd leave the ice there.

"We had a little club on Commercial Street that the boys from Foster, Charter and Commercial streets — 14, 15, 16 years old — used to go to. There was a Mrs. Burer of the Massachusetts Civic League who was very interested in the North End and the West End. She got an appointment with Mr. Curley when Curley was mayor and he gave us — there were five of us boys — he gave us a silver dollar each. Then he got land that was privately owned and made a little playground — the Foster Street playground.

"Too often people used to think of the North End, especially in the old days, as being just ditch diggers and laborers. Too often people think of the North End as being a place where people lived just because they had to. But a number of people who were in the professions lived here because they made the choice. They enjoyed the warmth, the integrity of the neighbors. They enjoyed the proximity of the church. Many people, I remember from my early days, were looked up to and held positions of prominence in industry; there were teachers, artists and business people. They lived here because they wanted to live here."

IV. *We call upon you to stop her weeping over earthquakes, eruptions and floods, and the desolation of ancient and new battlefields, to mingle with you in an everlasting embrace in amity and liberty and love.*

Sixty-four-year-old Alice Scola is a Lithuanian by birth but her soul has become Italian through her life in the North End.

"I met my husband when I was 17 and he took me to meet his family. Of course, they didn't like it because I was a Lithuanian girl; knowing that I was an outsider, not an Italian girl, they kind of objected. We straightened things out. We got married and both families agreed. I suppose there was nothing else they could do.

"I had to adjust my life a lot. I never knew Italian and I never knew many Italian people. My mother-in-law couldn't speak a word of English at the time, although she had children going to school. I had to adjust and learn, but she was very patient with me. I really adjusted more after my son was born. As I was going along my mother-in-law would say to me 'sedi' or 'mangi' and she would show me by gesture — she would sit and say, 'sedi'. Then she would say to me 'latte', since she thought it was good that I was nursing my son. I really learned.

"Nobody thinks I'm anything else but Italian now, between raising my children and cooking. I stayed in the same neighborhood all these years — just two houses I lived in since I lived in the North End. My husband went through printing school to be a linotype operator so he could have a trade.

"When our children got sick we had the Hill Street Dispensary — Haymarket Relief, and the Robert White Fund Building on North Margin Street, which was the Children's Welfare Clinic. Our doctors were on Hull Street. We never had our own private doctor. The Haymarket was affiliated with the City Hospital and you'd only go there in emergencies (like if children fell or hurt themselves). It was always open. You never wanted for anything. You always had either place to go when the children were sick.

"The landlady we had for 30 years, she decided to sell. These high rise people approached her. But she approached me and asked me if I would buy it. Being a widow and alone I didn't want to attempt taking care of an older house that needed renovations. So I went to all the neighbors and asked if anyone was interested in buying it and nobody wanted to take the chance to buy it alone.

"A friend of mine who's a lawyer said that if we were interested we could buy it condominium; buy the whole building and keep our own apartments. We had a meeting and we bought it. We couldn't take a mortgage out, so we all paid cash. There was an empty store downstairs so my brother-in-law took it and made it his barber shop. He's there from 7 to 7, so we always know we have a protector of the building when we're not home. We're all just neighbors, outside of my brother-in-law. We've known each other for 30 to 40 years. We get along. When something comes up, we want to do some fixing, we have a meeting. And we just take care of it. We've had no problems and we don't expect any. This is the only condominium that I know of made up of neighbors.

"Now the City gave the North End people the right to buy all along Fulton and Merchants Row and in that area, part of Richmond and part of Lewis Street, Commercial Street, to buy those old buildings that used to have chicken places and wholesale stores which would sell Jewish foods to the groceries. Egg places and bushel places and cardboard places. People just bought the empty shells and they'd fix



them up. There's about 20 or 30 families living here now and they have really done a beautiful job.

"They have one big area of a block they want for senior citizens and mostly they have to be of North End background or North End residents now. They're small apartments and they expect to have them ready within a couple of years. So even the North End Seniors will have their little place. The old people want to come back to the North End to live their days out. It still goes back to the old relation of parent and child."

Margaret Caruso is a white-haired, well organized woman who worked as Secretary to the North End Union. She cherishes the history and diversity of the North End.

"As children we used to go to camp in the summertime when we were school age. Camp Parker from the North End Union, Boxford Camp from the Industrial School. We'd go for two weeks. It was good, we were city people, we never had a chance to enjoy trees and grass. They'd teach you all these arts and

crafts and take you in the forest and things like that which we didn't see too much of. Our parents would allow that because we were under supervision.

"And as far as the North End Union today, it does a lot of work for the community. There's welfare workers that come up here to take care of the people; otherwise they would have to go to East Boston. And some of these people can hardly make it up the stairs. Then we have legal aid assistance for people of low income. And we have a Little City Hall. People come there to pay their bills. We have the senior citizen lounge for these people who have no other place to go. They spend their mornings here. Then they take them on bus trips or they have parties for them for different holidays. They really enjoy it.

"There's fewer Italians in the North End today than there were in my day. I don't think it has affected the sense of community. A lot of people in my organization are not Italians and we get along fabulously. They're marvelous people. I love the North End. I want to spend my days here. To me, it's home."

- V. *Let our two nations, the Mother and her  
last child march on together dissolubly until  
we weave together  
A shroud to all oppression  
A bridal gown for the young earth,  
Till we build together  
The city of the Sun,  
The new Jerusalem,  
The peaceful House of Man.*



Americanization meeting for Italian immigrants, 1924.  
(North End Union)



St. Mary's Church, 1935. St. Mary's was started in 1834 to serve the Irish moving into the North End, which, up to then, was primarily Protestant.



Damage from the Molasses Tank Explosion, 1919.  
(*The Boston Globe*)



Italian women celebrating their traditions at the North End Union. (*The North End Union*)

North Bennett Street Industrial School



One of the demonstrations protesting the conviction of Sacco and Vanzetti. (*The Boston Globe*)



## *Project Staff*

SARI ROBOFF, *writer, assistant project coordinator*

KATIE KENNEALLY, *project coordinator*

ANNE MILLET, *copy editor*

JAN CORASH, *photographic editor*

HARRON ELLENSEN, *neighborhood programs administrator*

---

*ACKNOWLEDGMENTS* The experiences and insights of many people contributed to the making of this history. We would like to thank especially the Oral History Subcommittee of the North End Bicentennial Committee: Pietrina Maravigna, Tia Talamini, Yolanda D'Eramo, and the following participants: Phyllis Abruzzi, Ann Antonino, George Antonino, Georgeann Antonino, Paul Antonino, Guy Beninati, Paula Bonnell, Emma Bussey, Marguerite Carbone, Margaret Caruso, Carmela Cerqua, Jack Conley, Robert D'Attilio, John Devlin, Claudia Di Folco, Caroline Esposito, Hon. Felix Forte, Rose Giampoala, Father Gordon, Sam Gurvitz, Dick Gutman, Geraldine Herrick, Frank Havey, Ernest Jacoby, Phyllis Luciani, Susan Limongelli, Marie Maffei, Virginia Magliaso, John Markuns, James Mills, Albert Mostone, Olympia Nazzaro, Gabriel Piemonte, Giovanni Polcari, Bantiste Ponte, Enrico Porente, Gemma Potito, Edith Repucci, Andrea Sarzana, Vinny Scarmuzza, Alice Scola, Milley Storella, Daniel Sweeney, and Paula Todisco.

*PHOTO CREDITS* Andrea Sarzana (Boston Architectural Center, designer of the neighborhood exhibit), Paula Bonnell, Marie Maffei, Dick Gutman, Print Department of the Boston Public Library, *The Boston Globe*, The Bostonian Society, the North End Union, the North End Branch of the Boston Public Library, and the North Bennett Street Industrial School.

*SPONSORS* The Boston 200 Neighborhood Histories Project was made possible through the support of: The Blanchard Foundation, The Godfrey M. Hyams Trust, The Massachusetts Bicentennial Commission, Workingmens Co-operative Bank, and the people of the City of Boston.





Boston 200™